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ABSTRACT

This paper analyzes data from the 2001 survey "BCTF (British Columbia Teachers' Federation) Worklife of Teacher Survey Series, I: Workload and Stress." Surveys were mailed to 1,500 teachers in British Columbia, and 644 teachers responded. Teachers identified and explained the most significant aspect of workload or stress in their professional lives. Almost all respondents identified multiple sources of stress in their teaching work, and these stress factors occurred repeatedly and concurrently. Three key areas of stress teachers identified were (1) increasing difficulty and complexity of teaching and relating to students (e.g., changing class composition and working with impoverished students); (2) the volume of work during a teacher's day and the expectations that teachers will address a wide range of tasks and issues (e.g., seasonal pressures, curriculum change, and expectations); and (3) lack of time, resources, support, and respect. The consequences of high workload stress include trying to cope, working excessively or opting for part-time employment, quitting teaching, becoming sick, and negative effects on family life. Overall, the study shows that British Columbia teachers have too high a workload, and many are suffering from stress. The effects of such stress are potentially devastating for many teachers. (SM)

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SECTION III
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What do British Columbia's teachers consider to be the most significant aspects of workload and stress in their work?

ED 464 030

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Analysis of qualitative data from the BCTF Worklife of Teachers Survey Series, 1: Workload and Stress

Charlie Naylor
BCTF Research
October 2001

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Acknowledgments

BCTF Research wishes to thank all those teachers who added to their workload and responded to this and other BCTF surveys during the Spring of 2001. The range and depth of their responses has provided the data on which to base this report, which will be used to lobby government and school boards to develop a healthier school system by reducing teachers' workload and stress.

The survey instrument was designed in collaboration with BCTF Research Analyst Anny Schaefer and Research Director Larry Kuehn.

Anne Field, BCTF Research Assistant, formatted the survey for 'TeleForm' data entry, processed the surveys, and prepared the qualitative data for analysis using 'Atlas' qualitative data analysis software.

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The context of this study

In the Spring of 2001, three surveys focusing on teacher workload and stress were prepared by BCTF Research staff and mailed to teachers across the province. The first survey examined the workload of secondary teachers of English ("English Teaching Workload Survey Questionnaire," March 2001). The second considered workload and stress issues as perceived by both elementary and secondary teachers ("BCTF Worklife of Teachers Survey Series, 1: Workload and Stress," April 2001), and the third addressed teacher perspectives on issues in Special Education ("BCTF Worklife of Teachers Survey Series, 2: Special Education," June 2001). BCTF Research staff are producing a series of reports based on data generated from the surveys.

Two reports have already been published; both are accessible on the web:

A look at the international context:

- Teacher workload and stress: An international perspective on human costs and systemic failure. (Charlie Naylor) September, 2001.

  www.bctf.ca/ResearchReports/2001wlc01

Analysis of the data from the English-teachers' survey:

- "I love teaching English, but ..." A study of the workload of English teachers in B.C. secondary grades. (Charlie Naylor and John Malcolmson) September, 2001.

  www.bctf.ca/ResearchReports/2001wlc02

Additional reports are forthcoming. They will be published electronically on the BCTF's web site, at *www.bctf.ca* . Look up "What's New" on the Index tab to find links to Publications, Briefs, and Reports.

Introduction

This paper is based on analysis of qualitative data from the survey "BCTF Worklife of Teachers Survey Series, 1: Workload and Stress", April 2001. Fifteen-hundred surveys were mailed to teachers in a stratified random sample of B.C. teachers. Six hundred forty-four elementary and secondary teachers from districts across the province returned surveys, a return rate of 43%.

The survey's qualitative data section asked respondents to:

> *"...identify and explain the most significant aspect of workload or stress in your professional life."*

Almost all respondents identified multiple causes of stress in their work as teachers. Such stress factors occurred repeatedly and concurrently. While some teachers spoke of their job as a vocation that they still loved and wanted to do, far more spoke of stress caused by workload and environment. A large number of comments were made about stress, such numbers alone providing evidence of a significant problem for many teachers in British Columbia's schools.

Some respondents stated that they are coping with workload and stress, but their tone was measured:

> *"I still love teaching but find that my energy level, especially in terms of recovery from working hard on a drama project or extra-curricular coaching leaves me very exhausted. The kids have changed in terms of attitude (respect, work ethic, etc.) as well, and I find that my tolerance level for improper behaviour or lack of care by students gets me really irate quickly. Teaching should allow more opportunities for rest and relaxation. It is a completely consuming job. I like giving to kids the things I know. I like seeing them achieve success. But when your tail is dragging you tend to lose perspective. It's a hard job but most days I'm glad I'm in it."*

> ***"I have been very stressed this year due to an illness, but have still been expected to perform my teaching duties plus all other extra-curricular activities.... I also work in a low socio-economic area and the children come from very low income households with little or no support from parents who don't always have a positive outlook on education. I worry a lot about these children, who need so much more from me than just how to learn to read & write! However, all in all, I am satisfied with my chosen profession and I enjoy each day in the classroom!!"***

However, even these measured comments were a small minority of respondents. Most respondents reported significant areas of stress in their work. Three key areas can be identified as causing stress to teachers.

1. The increasing difficulty and complexity of teaching and relating to students

a. Changing class composition: the integration of ESL students and students with special needs

One of the most common factors which made teaching more difficult was changing class composition, with increased numbers of students with special needs, and increased numbers of ESL students, in many classrooms. Typically, many respondents stated that the difficulty of meeting such students' needs constituted a major stress factor in their work:

> *"Given the composition of my classes and their size, I do not feel able to adequately address all required learning outcomes, nor can I meet sufficiently many of my students' special needs."*

The following comment reflects the frustration of one teacher for whom class composition has exacerbated workload pressures, and who states that it is not the only pressure in a complex work environment:

> *"Trying to teach two grades filled with ESL, special needs kids, behavioural problems, children leaving to go to Learning Assistance, counselling, and doing this while attempting to meet all the IRP outcomes (for 2 grades), and sit on 2 or 3 committees, attend meetings...."*

Another teacher more directly stated the link between class composition and stress:

> *"Having a split class with one low-incidence special needs student, two high-incidence problem students, the variety of behaviour/family-problems-related students, and trying to teach the required curriculum = STRESS."*

The prevalence of significant numbers of ESL students and students with special needs in many classroom makes teaching more difficult and stressful because a range of pedagogical and organizational approaches are necessary in addition to those used to teach the non-ESL/special needs students. In addition, there are a wide range of special needs, some of which require considerable adaptation of approach or modification of materials. The capacity to adapt and modify often requires training and specialist support, and such training and supports are not always available, thereby increasing the pressure and demands on the classroom teacher:

> *"I find the expectation of teaching special needs frustrating and stressful. I am expected to teach 2 K classes next year with severely autistic children. At this point I know nothing about autism. There will also be a "high-incident" behavioural challenged child as well!"*

> *"My class is so mixed with 'special' children, it is very stressful on me and the rest of my class. It seems I can't just teach. I have to revise & change and set too many different programs. I get very frustrated & so do my students. It takes a lot of my energy for about one-third of my class. This seems to be becoming the norm and not the exception. Should so much of our time be spent on one group of students? What about the rest?"*

"I have 30 students in my class with wide-ranging learning styles, behaviours, and ability, with very little extra support (Learning Assistance, Special Education Assistants, etc.), even though several students are many grade levels below or above the 'average'. I feel constant stress about providing a program that will benefit all of these diverse learners. Most teachers teach because of their love of teaching and helping children, and thus the feeling that some students are getting 'short-changed' is VERY stressful."

"[The most significant factor in workload stress is] Inclusion policy — dealing with significant educational, emotional, behavioural, health — problems in a classroom with little support for the problems. Time and effort is directed to the exceptional student to the detriment of the class and I often find myself 'coping' rather than teaching. Particularly evident this year, as there are those individuals in my classroom, none with full time assistance, and none of whom are able to cope with a regular program. One is a health problem (no aide time but special equipment to help with physical disabilities); one is low functioning (separate academic materials in all subject areas — 5 hours aide time); one is severe Down's Syndrome — not independent functioning (20 hours aide time)."

63% of teachers who responded to the third Spring 2001 BCTF survey (Worklife 2: Special Education) supported the philosophy of inclusion, with only 23% explicitly stating their disagreement with the policy. However, 86% of respondents stated that the daily implementation of the policy was difficult. Teachers believe that they are expected to implement a policy of integration without adequate support or resources, an expectation that drastically increases workload and induces stress.

Evidence has recently emerged corroborating a long-term BCTF claim that that B.C. seriously under-funds Special Education.[1] Simply put, integration policies that are seriously under-funded place immense strain on those expected to deal with the pragmatic and daily consequences of such policies: the classroom teachers of B.C., and those specialists and assistants who struggle to make integration work because of inadequate supports and funding.

One category of special needs was identified by many respondents as being particularly problematic. This was the issue of students with behavioural problems, who made teaching more stressful, in part because of the effect of the student or students' negative behaviour on the teacher, but also because such behaviour disrupted the teacher's capacity to meet all students' needs within the classroom. There were also comments from many respondents who indicated that this problem had become worse in recent years:

"Student behaviour tends to cause the most stress."

"It gets harder & harder to meet the needs of all my students. I don't feel I'm doing as good a job as I did 5 years ago because it takes time. The needs of the students become more diverse or the needier kids become a larger part of the class (ESL, behaviour, special needs) and more of my time now goes to doing some things I didn't have to do 5 years ago."

[1] Perry, N.E., McNamara, J.K., Mercer, K.L. (2001). Principles, Policies and Practices in Special Education in British Columbia. Paper presented at the CSSE conference, Laval, Quebec, May

"Having a vast difference in both the abilities and behaviours of students and lacking the means with which to help them is the most stressful part [of teaching]."

Respondents expressed strong concern about students who were generally disruptive, whether or not they were officially designated as having a behaviour problem. One teacher described:

"...the frustration in dealing with severely disruptive students who continually interfere with other students' learning and for whom we have no alternative programs or useful recourse."

Another identified disruptive behaviour as the major source of stress:

"There have been a lot of aspects that have contributed to my work load & stress this year. (1) class composition: Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder student significantly affected dynamics in my class. The student's behaviour was continually disruptive and it greatly affected my stress level & the class. I was close to needing to take time off. Instead I cut back my time to 0.6 from 0.89. I feel this is unfair because it compromises my income. Finally, the parent decided to home school the child in April. He may be coming back this next week, which I'm very hesitant about. When the child was in the class, he had a negative ripple effect on others (e.g., talking, messy floor area, unfocused, not completing work). Students suffered, because I could not get to them to help them."

b. Working with students who live in poverty, or in unstable situations

Teachers who responded to this survey reflected considerable empathy for students living in poverty, or in unstable family environments. They were not critical of students or their families, but they were concerned that poverty or instability reduced the chances that such students would learn effectively:

"Children come to school hungry/dirty/suffering from home lives (drugs, single parent, etc.), lack of sleep, very difficult to work with this in a large class (28) and one that has behaviour problems, social problems (bullying), etc. Not enough help (counselling, teachers' assistants)."

A number of respondents discussed what they believed to be a general decline in family stability in recent years:

"I am at a relatively 'good neighbourhood' school but have seen the deterioration of family stability over the years. This has a negative effect on children."

One respondent indicated a major source of stress was the:

"...increased numbers of 'at risk' kids — academic and behavioral. Increased number of dysfunctional families. Increased number of non-supportive parents. No increase in counselling time, youth workers, and student support services to help address needs."

Another teacher identified the need for a radical rethinking of the approach to wellness for both teachers and students, so that students are supported in ways that ready them for learning and alleviate some of the worst aspects of poverty, and so that teachers stress-induced illnesses are seriously addressed.:

> *"A paradigm shift needs to take place in the education system in terms of teachers' workload, stress levels, discipline strategies, Administrative Officer support, wellness programs...and parents' responsibility. Teachers work long hours. There is a high rate of burnout and sickness. Wellness programs need to be established for teacher coping and student healthiness and self-esteem. For example, eating programs and nutrition. Many students come to school grumpy, tired, undernourished, and hungry."*

c. Working with students who are reluctant to be in school

Some respondents described teaching students who did not want to be in school. Their reluctance resulted in friction and tensions which add to teachers' stress levels.

> *"[We need to] find alternative settings for students who don't want to be in school."*
>
> *"Disrespect from students makes my teaching life very difficult."*
>
> *"[A major stress is] trying to keep on top of students who skip classes (with parents' consent), keeping students who are in hospital up-to-date with assignments, managing a class with little respect for the subject area..., and to be continually creative under pressure, stress, and fatigue. Let me just say I am very disappointed in the teaching profession. I'm sorry I chose it and spent so much time in university, money in tuition fees, and energy in hopes of obtaining a meaningful, fulfilling career."*

The issue of the "reluctant student" may be of greater significance than has been explored in recent years, both as an educational problem and as a stress on teachers, particularly in secondary schools. In a context of declining economic opportunities for youth without high-school graduation, the pressure for all students to remain in school is high. At the same time, there is an expectation of high academic standards for all students, reinforced by governments, and through imposed accountability instruments such as the Foundation Skills Assessment and Grade 12 examinations. The media ranking of schools, based on large-scale assessment measures, adds to the pressure on schools to achieve high academic outcomes. Schools, therefore, are placed in an unenviable position: they must keep students in schools and maximize their academic achievement.

The system's focus on and prioritization of academic outcomes may lead to a mismatch between government and societal expectations (high academic achievement) and the reality of some students with minimal interest in academics, or who are simply unable to reach such academic levels. If this occurs, teachers are caught in the middle, the focus of pressure from governments to maximize narrowly and externally-defined achievement for students. At the same time they teach students for whom those levels are of no interest. The result is stress and anxiety, caught between the "rock" of expectations and the "hard place" of some students' apathy to academic school subjects and alienation from schooling in general.

2. The volume of work during a teacher's day, and the expectations that teachers will address a wide range of tasks and issues

Respondents identified five aspects of volume and range of work which increased workload and exacerbated stress:

a. The volume of work

It is startling to read teachers' comments about the hours they work, and how intensely they work. Several reported working over 60 hours each week, others stating that extra-curricula activities consumed over 20 hours a week. Some teachers' commitment to teaching appears so strong that they are sacrificing their physical and mental health, and in some cases their relationships, to maintain their programs and classes, often working more than sixty hours each week. This represents a severe and unsustainable imbalance in many teachers' lives.

Many respondents reported not being able to take time for lunch, and working during their evenings and weekends, with some teachers viewing early retirement as the only likely escape from a heavy workload:

> *"Most of the time, I feel as though I am on a treadmill. In order to reduce the workload over the weekends and evenings I try to work through my lunch hour. Having reduced my appointments has also helped, but it doesn't mean I work less. I use almost every minute for prep or other school-related activities."*

> *"[There are] countless hours I spend most evenings & weekends to plan/deliver the program I teach. H.e.l.p.!!! (only two more years to early retirement, thank goodness!!) P.S.I would not have said this five years ago!"*

> *"I love the job, but I hate the hours. My students appreciate how quickly I get work back to them, but also say I need 'to get a life'. They realize that all weekends are spent helping them and marking. I agree!"*

b. The range and complexity of teachers' work, and how this has changed over time

In terms of the range and complexity of tasks facing teachers, teachers mentioned a wide range of work activities, including numerous meetings, paperwork, purchasing of materials (often with teachers' own money[2]), increased testing with the Foundation Skills Assessment, even cleaning of facilities. All of these are in addition to what is involved in the core activities of teaching students, which include class contact teaching, preparation and marking, assessment, evaluation and reporting, and extra-curricular activities.

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[2] BCTF Research Report (2001). "So where are the Learning Resources, and who paid for them? A report by the Learning Resources Committee, Surrey Teachers' Association." *www.bctf.ca/ResearchReports/2001e01*

The data indicate that teachers believe that there have been significant additions to the core activities of teaching, as well as changes to the nature of teaching with the addition of many non-teaching tasks. This is perhaps at the heart of the problem of teacher workload. Teachers are expected to do far more than teach, and the expectations appear to have no limit, resulting in what many teachers see as a continually expanding but unstated job description, with much added but nothing taken away, resulting in an unacceptably high workload:

> *"[I spend] hours on-site cleaning, organizing, making materials (books, worksheets, centre activities, at meetings, learning about new approaches to learning, tracking students who need to be identified, then are not."*
>
> *"[I spend] extra time helping ESL, special needs students, report cards, prep and marking to provide the best planning and assessment/classroom experiences possible."*
>
> *"[I have] less energy, emerging health problems, keeping up with increasing workload, keeping up with changes in the workplace, adapting to these changes in a productive way, meeting increasingly-demanding student behaviour with creative and constructive responses."*

c. Seasonal pressures, with intense periods of work in addition to the regular load

Some respondents reported particular pressures at certain times of the year, particularly when report cards were being prepared. There appears to be wide variation in reporting expectations, but a common theme is apparent: reporting takes a huge amount of time, and is very stressful:

> *"Report cards usually coincide with Christmas and spring concerts, so that I work pretty much 18 hours per day until it's all done."*
>
> *"By far the most significant stress for me as a teacher is writing report cards. The time it takes to competently prepare report cards causes me enormous stress because of the time it takes away from my family!"*
>
> *"Report card writing! The amount of time put into this is incredible. We should be provided with software that will make this process much less time-consuming, but still provide the parents with important & relevant information."*

d. Curriculum change

Respondents stated that the range of expectations had expanded in recent years, and that tasks were consistently being added to teachers' workload. Curriculum changes were one area causing workload pressure:

> *"[The major cause of stress has been] the number and pace of curriculum change in mathematics the last few years," or "the ministry giving us 2 complete curriculum changes in the last 8 or 9 years."*
>
> *"There have been curriculum changes in mathematics every year for the past 5 years and it's still going on. Resources to run the new curriculum are at*

least 2 years behind, and training for the new technology required by changes has been minimal & offered only sporadically, not yearly to allow real understanding & improvement."

Curriculum was not the only issue. The major concern of many respondents appeared to be the incremental and cumulative additional expectations, directed towards teachers from diverse sources. A summary of the feelings expressed by teachers might be that everybody has increased expectations but nobody offers more support, and in some cases supports are reduced while expectations rise. The consequence is that teachers' workload increases, resulting in stress with a range of stress-induced consequences:

"With ever-increasing range of Integrated Resource Packages (IRPs), and Learning Outcomes, we are spreading ourselves thin. While the above increase, the number of hours to fit it all in stays the same. It would be less stressful if we had a strong commitment to teaching few things & doing them well. Where do we draw the line? Children are arriving with multiple social problems and large chunks of our day are spent parenting rather than teaching."

e. Expectations

Why do teachers work as long and intensely as they do? It appears clear from the data that the majority of teachers who work excessive hours do so because they want to do their best for their students. But a second factor is apparent in these data: that there exists a strong yet subtle pressure on teachers to add to their workload regardless of what their existing workload might be. What makes this pressure so difficult to identify is that it has many origins and sources, including government, employer, administrative officers, colleagues, parents, students and community. All "expect" something, but few ever consider the effect of cumulative expectations, which these data indicate to be excessive workload and stress.

The pressure felt by teachers is identified in the data by the thread of a single word: "expectations". Teachers consistently state that they are "expected" to do a particular task, or that they were "responsible" for dealing with a problem.

"The most significant aspect of workload or stress in my professional life is the overwhelming amount of curriculum that I am expected to teach. Even though I know I can't possibly teach it all, I keep trying. This is exhausting!!!"

"[I am] expected to shoulder too much...society's expectations are absurd! Work overload!!"

"[I have a] feeling of inadequacy to deal with the multitude of problems students come to high-school classes with. I am often told that I am responsible for all of these complex problems, but cannot effect the kind of change necessary given my time and energy constraints, and the reality of their problems.... [There is] not enough time in the day to do all that is expected or needed from me."

"The expectation that teachers must do more than teach, they are expected take on many of the responsibilities of the parents."

"Very few people understand the workload, & expect teachers to be infallible."

"In 6 years my position has been cut from 0.9 to 0.4, yet I am still expected to deliver the same services to staff and students. The job reduction has been stressful."

Perhaps teachers should have job descriptions which place definable limits on their hours worked, and which state a list of duties that are considered part of their work, with appropriate time allocation. Such descriptions might then prevent what currently appears to be a perennially expanding set of work-related demands and expectations.

3. What is lacking to make teachers' work manageable?

In reviewing the qualitative data, the words "lack" or "lacking" occurred repeatedly. Teachers spoke of their determined efforts to make schools work for students, but their best efforts were frustrated by what was lacking in schools to make their teaching effective. Some teachers expressed their frustration and urged the BCTF to bargain aggressively in order to address the many things lacking in schools:

"[There exists a] lack of respect, lack of good wages, lack of resources. Lack of time. Get out there and bargain a strong collective agreement for teachers!! We are fed up!!"

Four main areas can be identified in terms of what teachers believe to be lacking in schools:

a. Time

A considerable number of respondents stated that there was insufficient time to complete their work:

"We are expected to teach more and more content as well as dealing with all of the social needs. It often feels like there is not time to teach many of the basic academics."

The lack of time is clearly linked to the considerable expectations of teachers addressing a wide range of tasks:

"There are too many provincial- and district-level accountability 'hoops' to jump through: setting school goals/mission statements/district goals/collecting data/district and provincial assessments/reporting procedures, etc. Many processes are redundant, and could be combined, reduced (like accreditation), or simplified, which would give me more contact time with students."

The problem appears to be that teachers are continually expanding the time they spend working, whether at school or at home. There is strong evidence from both qualitative and quantitative data that while demands on teachers' time increase, teachers supply more time, often at significant costs to their health and family lives.

b. Resources

Many teachers stated that even the most basic resources, such as textbooks, were not adequately supplied to meet student needs. Others spoke of limited lab equipment, or of having to purchase supplies for their classrooms because insufficient supplies were provided to enable them to teach the required curriculum:

> *"I'm tired of being expected to use my own income to subsidize public education. I have spent approximately $2,000 of my own income to purchase basic supplies, books, and resources."*
>
> *"The most significant aspect of my workload is searching and collecting resources for my topic of study. The district once had a well-operated resource centre for teachers, but due to lack of funding the resource centre has down-sized considerably."*
>
> *"[I am] overwhelmed by the amount of curriculum that needs to be delivered and the lack of school resources."*

The evidence suggests that books and other basic learning resources, lab equipment, and classroom supplies are not provided or distributed in ways that meet needs. This makes teachers' work more difficult, thereby increasing workload as they struggle to use or find texts and other materials, and increases stress.

c. Support

In some cases, respondents stated that they were finding limited teacher-on-call availability, or limited access to staff who provide assistance with ESL and special needs students, whether specialist teachers or teachers' assistants. The absence of such supports has in some cases made professional development less available. It also increases the pressure on some teachers to work when they may be sick, as they are concerned that a TOC may not be available:

> *"Without TOCs I simply work whether I'm sick or not, which draws out illnesses."*
>
> *"It is so hard to get ready for a TOC, and then pick up the slack, that I go to school [when I am] sick."*
>
> *"If I get sick I just keep going because we lack qualified TOCs."*

In other cases they spoke of the limited or lack of support from administrative officers, from parents, or members of the community. This combination of tangible supports, and the less tangible sense of limited or non-existent good will and encouragement, appears to be draining some teachers' capacity to work effectively, increasing their sense of isolation, and, in some cases, abandonment.

d. Respect

Respondents indicated several areas of limited respect for the work they do, including the low salary, and the assumptions of some people in communities who believe that teachers "have it easy":

> *"I work very long hours to provide an excellent program for my students. As I am a single parent, I am worried about the level of pay I receive for the long hours I work. It is frustrating to hear people at the grocery store (etc.) complaining about teachers and how cushy their jobs are. It is ironic that the 'stock' people make more per hour than I do and do not affect how our future generation will turn out."*
>
> *"I am a single mom who does not go on holidays due to no money during summer months."*
>
> *"Low pay [is a problem] — I feel we are undervalued."*
>
> *"I know that my salary will not cover all the expenses and having to think how to pay for the summer."*

Low and uncompetitive pay reflects a lack of respect for teachers. Many workers in jobs requiring far less education and training, and with less responsibility, now receive better pay than do teachers. But respondents indicated that the lack of respect was not only reflected in salary scales, but in teachers' regular interactions with some administrative officers, parents, students, and even with some other teachers.

4. The consequences of high workload and stress

The qualitative section of this survey asked teachers to discuss what constituted the "most significant aspect of workload stress" in their professional life. It did not ask them to divulge information concerning consequences, or ascertain degrees of stress levels. Nevertheless, five consequences of high workload and stress can be identified based on analysis of the qualitative data.

a. Respondents who are coping with workload and stress

While almost all survey respondents appeared overworked and suffering from stress, there are degrees of overwork and different reactions to stress among respondents to this survey. One group of teachers, a small minority of respondents, appeared to be managing stress and found it within acceptable limits, though even they appeared cautious and reluctant to express much confidence about not succumbing to stress in the future.

b. Working excessively, or opting for part-time employment

Full-time work for many teachers is actually more than a full-time job, with the extra time becoming more the norm than the exception. The excessive time above what many would consider a normal work day appears to be a cause of resentment which may increase stress:

> *"I love my work with students. I love teaching, but I really resent all the unpaid hours I need to put in to make learning meaningful and interesting. All the expected unpaid hours one has to put in to make the job work. I cannot think of any other job (especially government jobs) that expect so much extra, unpaid work beyond a standard eight-hour day."*

Such excessive work is also a likely indicator of future stress-related illness, with both physical and mental fatigue accumulating with excessive workload.

A number of respondents were considering part-time work as a coping mechanism. Some of those who were considering part-time work used the remaining time to complete marking or preparation without being paid. Some teachers are therefore effectively subsidizing the education system by working full-time for part-time pay:

> *"I am subsidizing the schools to an extent by working part-time to make the workload bearable."*

Other respondents simply could not balance the demands of work and home if they worked full-time:

> *"For me there is no single factor which is significant, but rather it is all the aspects of the job together which become overwhelming when trying to juggle a family and a healthy life as well, and so I work part-time."*

c. Quitting teaching

This group spoke of the fact that current workload and stress were negatively impacting their interest in teaching, and their motivation to remain a teacher, however much they loved both their subject and teaching students:

> *"I am seriously thinking about quitting teaching, because of workload and stress. I feel I have aged incredibly over the last year, and my health has been greatly affected at times. I love teaching and sharing ideas with others. I also love getting to know students. They are our future and a tough group to teach. Thank you for letting me voice my opinion!!"*

> *"I plan on leaving the profession to seek employment in other areas outside teaching."*

d. Becoming sick

While a number of respondents reported illness directly caused by stress, only some of those took sick leave. Others reported staying at work even though they were sick:

> *"I work on average 60–70 hours a week in order to keep organized & up to date. When I am not organized & up to date, then I feel everything is not operating functionally. Therefore I don't have time to get sick or 'smell the*

roses'-so to speak, because there is just too much work to do. Yet this trap of working so much is what gets me sick & all stressed out — it's a vicious trap. Yet I continue teaching, even when I'm sick, because I feel responsible for providing a strong program & because I love working with students!"

Other teachers did take leave when they became ill because of stress:

"I love working with the kids. They aren't a cause of stress for me. It's all the 'stuff' above that takes the fun out of teaching. Due to the stress at work I had to take 2 months medical leave to prevent premature delivery. During that medical leave the problems I have been experiencing stopped. Teaching is a demanding job. Very few people understand the workload, & expect teachers to be infallible."

"I have developed significant health problems due to stress, unrealistic expectations and lack of support. I have had to take part-time medical leave and fight to get it approved. I have still not been offered any assistance by administration. Now [other] teachers at my school are...showing signs of stress."

"Is this the beginning of burnout? I'm feeling really tired lately, and have been sick off and on for 2 months."

"I have been sick for so long and so often that I have no sick days left."

e. Effects on family life and relationships

Many teachers reported negative effects on their own family life as a result of high workload and stress:

"[There is a] lack of school time for report cards!! It must be done on my personal time, which takes away from my family and significantly cuts into my sleep (with three children under 5, I must do them late at night when they are asleep)."

"As my husband also teaches..., often our family obligations conflict with our marking loads, causing stress in the home."

"I find it hard to raise a family & do justice to both job and family, so both get cheated."

"I love to teach, but I have a huge homework load which interferes with my family life. It has also deterred my children from entering teaching."

Conclusion

Data from this survey indicate that most B.C. teachers have too high a workload and that many are suffering from stress. The volume of work, the wide range of workload duties, changing class composition, and the fact that many stressful incidents happen each and every day, induce considerable stress among teachers in this province.

The effects of such stress are potentially devastating for many teachers. Some will reduce the time for which they are paid, but will work extra time without pay. Some will become sick, and continue to work, perhaps leading to a major health breakdown, and often causing problems within their own families or relationships. Others will take a stress-related leave, or will quit teaching altogether. This survey has only been completed by teachers who are still teaching, so we have no indication how many teachers may have left the profession because of workload and stress.

All of the consequences are disturbing, as is the general feeling of disillusionment with a profession that for many respondents is clearly a vocation, and not just a job. Analysis of these data suggests that teachers' disillusionment stems from the fact that though they care deeply about the *students* in our schools, they increasingly believe that nobody appears to care greatly about *teachers*, as no effort has been made to consider their workload.

The findings from these qualitative data closely match the findings in the international literature on teacher workload and stress. What has occurred in England, Australia, and the USA, appears also to be occurring in British Columbia. While governments and employers frequently access selective international literature to support a change they intend to mandate, few appear to have considered the literature on teacher workload and stress. Such a literature is unambiguous: teacher workloads are excessive and stress-related costs are growing.

An effective public school system depends upon the health and well-being of its teachers. They expect to work hard in a challenging environment, but they cannot continue to work what are currently excessive hours in intense environments, where multiple roles are the norm, and still be effective as teachers. Concerted and collaborative efforts need to be expended on reducing teacher workload to manageable levels.

Such an effort would benefit student learning, and would be cost-effective because it would reduce stress-induced sick leave among B.C.'s teachers. In addition, without such an effort, B.C. may suffer the same problems of recruitment and retention that are being experienced in England. There, teaching has become an unattractive profession, largely because of high workload, low status, and what teachers perceive to be a prolonged societal hostility and disdain for the teaching profession.

The causes and consequences of stress have been identified and solutions can be found, if school districts, government, and communities care enough about the health and effectiveness of teachers in our public schools to address the issue of teacher workload. Far too great an emphasis has been placed on change and expectations, without any consideration of the manageability of such change for teachers. It is surely time to redress the balance, and to make the B.C. K-12 education system more manageable and healthier, for the benefit of all those who work and learn in our schools.

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